



Connecticut Community Action

Testimony of James H. Gatling, Ph.D.

Before the Human Services Committee

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

***S. B. No. 843 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING SOCIAL SERVICES.**

Good morning Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and ladies and gentleman of the Human Services Committee. My name is James Gatling and I am the Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) and President/CEO of New Opportunities, Inc. CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's 12 Community Action Agencies which serve all 169 towns and cities in the state and New Opportunities is the Community Action Agency serving 26 towns and cities in north central Connecticut.

I am here this afternoon to express my strong opposition to the portion of the Governor's budget which directly impacts our agencies' ability to provide direct services and case management to our low-income children, our elderly and disabled and working poor families – specifically the recommended elimination of the Human Services Infrastructure Community Action Agency line of funding from the budget and transferring these bedrock support funds to regional planning agencies to put out to bid.

This proposed realignment would, in essence, create another level of expensive bureaucracy that would mean further reductions in actual program dollars, while the decision to award the contract would still have to be reviewed by DSS and OPM. Such a time-consuming and convoluted process would create additional delays in getting funds to where they are desperately needed – our customers! Additionally, the regional planning agencies have been roads, transportation, water and more physical bricks and mortar planning groups and operations, not human services oriented: therefore, they do not have

the expertise and experience to evaluate and make such important decisions that would impact so many vulnerable individuals and families, especially at this time of great need.

Right now, due to the worst economy the state has witnessed since the Great Depression, our agencies are seeing a dire need for assistance to Connecticut families including help with fuel, food and other forms of aid - the highest levels we have ever seen. People who have never sought relief from our CAAs before are coming to our door for help. Just in energy assistance requests alone, almost 30,000 new customers statewide have come to our agencies for help paying their heating bills – while in our agencies they are requesting job search help because they’ve lost their jobs, eviction prevention help, and food assistance. These people are in desperate need of all support services our agencies offer! Our workers are on the front-line in providing these services and, thankfully, we have the information and the expertise needed to provide comprehensive support to meet many of these needs.

The CAAs are unique in our ability to serve as “one stop centers” for many services, such as: heating; food assistance services; credit repair and money management; free tax preparation and asset development; utility matching payment plan; child care and Head Start; elderly nutrition, meals on wheels and homemaker services for the elderly which helps keep our senior citizens at home and out of much more expensive nursing homes. As our Results –Based Reporting indicates, you cannot get a better return on investment than with dollars spent in Community Action Agency through the programs we offer.

In this time of scarce resources it is very important for you to know what is being accomplished with state funds and that make results reporting crucial. I believe the community action network is the only social services delivery system in the state that can provide you with such detailed reporting: The following is one example of our RBA reporting:

How much did we do?

- Nearly 285,000 people statewide benefited from CAA services last year.
- Over 48,000 people received referrals to other services they need.

How well did we do it?

- CAA's raised an additional \$26.67 for every dollar of HSI funding.
- CAA's recruited volunteers to help reduce poverty; 753,179 hours donated = 362 FTE's.
- Over \$10 million returned to our state's economy with volunteer tax preparation assistance.

Is anyone better off?

- Over 285,000 people have moved closer to self-sufficiency. Examples:
 - Over 4,000 people went to work.
 - Over 21,000 people learned to save, invest and decrease debt.
 - 5,750 pre-school aged children are better prepared to start school.
 - Kids did better in school – socially, emotionally, athletically and academically.
 - Over 10,500 people statewide live in more safe, stable housing.
 - Over 121,000 households reduced/eliminated emergency needs.
 - Over 32,000 senior citizens maintain an active, independent life style.

This clearly shows that many individuals and families who came to us for services are better off.

The \$4.7 million in Human Services Infrastructure Community Action Agency line in the CT state budget is critical in allowing the CAA network to continue to provide the case management services that can respond to the needs of our communities. Also, these funds help provide operational support for programs that have inadequate funds for the administration of many programs, such as energy assistance and child care. Restoration of the HSI line in the budget at level funding is a must for the ongoing operation of the CAA network so that we can continue to meet these needs during this very difficult time. Additionally, the Department of Social Services uses this as a state match for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach program.

As it is, Connecticut's financial support for the Community Action Network has dramatically decreased over the past fifteen years – from a high of \$8,209,854 million in 1992 to today's \$4.7 This is a reduction of over \$3.5 million dollars a year in real dollars and much more than that when inflation is figured in. This reduction has come at the same time we are asked to do more for the state's low income children and families. However, you have managed over the years to continue this critical baseline level of support.

I would like to thank the legislature, especially members of this committee, for your understanding of the importance of supporting the CAAs - CT's federally designated anti-poverty agencies – and the work we do for our most vulnerable residents. Your ongoing support has been crucial to our successes in serving CT's poor residents.

In closing we want to stress that we are happy to work with everyone, as we should all be working together to address the needs of those most vulnerable in our communities at this time of unprecedented economic turmoil, job loss and overall hardships for CT families. But please understand that the HSI funding is crucial in maintaining these basic safety net services for low-income and working poor families during the worst economic time in recent memory. Community Action Agencies are working with the state to provide services to customers in the most cost-effective and efficient way possible. We extend our services and offer continued partnership with the

- Governor's office
- Legislature
- Utilities
- Workforce Boards
- Schools and Community Colleges
- Social Services providers
- Churches
- Businesses

We would be happy to answer any of your questions.